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Viewing cable 09QUITO298, COUNTDOWN TO ELECTIONS; PRESIDENT'S RACE FOREGONE

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09QUITO298	2009-04-27 12:09	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Quito

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.eluniverso.com/2011/04/20/1/1355/cable-204247.html>

VZCZCXYZ0002
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #0298/01 1171209
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 271209Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0304
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 8115
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 4161
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3520
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ APR LIMA 3172
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4287

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000298

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: TEN YEARS
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPLS](#) [OAS](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: COUNTDOWN TO ELECTIONS; PRESIDENT'S RACE FOREGONE
CONCLUSION

Classified By: Ambassador Heather Hodges for reason 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (SB...

id: 204247
date: 4/27/2009 12:09
refid: 09QUITO298
origin: Embassy Quito
classification: CONFIDENTIAL
destination:
header:
VZCZCXYZ0002
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #0298/01 1171209
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 271209Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0304
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----- header ends -----

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: With four days remaining before the April 26 elections, President Correa sits comfortably ahead of all other candidates, with polls showing him with enough votes for a first-round win. Recently arrived international election observation teams have reported concern with how the lack of regulation of government propaganda has played to the favor of the incumbent government; however, fraud on election day is unlikely. Overall, the presidential campaign has been lackluster, with little real debate (face to face or otherwise) on policy issues. Key outcomes to watch are the size of Correa's margin, and the National Assembly and Quito mayoral race results. End Summary.

LAST-MINUTE BLUNDER AND CAMPAIGN ADJUSTMENTS

¶2. (SBU) Three opposition political parties were omitted in sample city council ballots for Ecuador's largest city of Guayaquil on the Sunday preceding the elections. The party lists missing were the New Option movement, the Patriotic Society Party, and most notably, Guayaquil mayor and leading candidate Jaime Nebot's Social Christian Party and Warrior Material Movement alliance. The National Electoral Council took responsibility for the error and the ballot was reprinted in El Universo, the newspaper in which the faulty ballot was originally published. However, the reprinted sample ballot appeared in a small space on an inside page of the newspaper, while a GOE advertisement praising the government's stewardship of the economy took up the prominent back page of the paper.

¶3. (SBU) On April 16, the National Electoral Council announced that Correa would be prohibited from transmitting his weekly radio and TV address the Saturday before elections, in accordance with electoral rule that no candidate may make public appearances, or activities with "proselytizing" characteristics between April 23 and 27. This is on the heels of a National Electoral Council decision in late March to fine Correa \$650 for criticizing his presidential opponents during his weekly public address and its threat to suspend the programs completely if he made any more references to other candidates. After a public exchange

of critical words with the Council, Correa and his Proud and Sovereign Fatherland (PAIS) movement submitted an official appeal to the Electoral Disputes Tribunal on April 6, and Correa at least avoided referring to his opponents by name during his April 11 address. The appeal, along with the March 12 appeal of the "Hey Jude" fine, is still awaiting a ruling from the Tribunal.

NEW VOTERS EFFECT

¶4. (SBU) New segments of the population, totaling almost one million of 10.5 million voters expected overall, will be given the opportunity to vote in the elections as mandated by the new constitution. Youth between the ages of 16 and 18, Ecuadorians residing outside of Ecuador, foreigners residing legally within Ecuador, military and police, and inmates still awaiting sentences are entitled to go to the polling booths for the first time on April 26. Although not obligatory, over half a million youths were registered, followed by 185,000 external Ecuadorians, nearly 100,000 military and police officers, over 80,000 non-Ecuadorians with at least five years of legal residence in the country, and 2,700 inmates. The local NGO, Citizen Participation has expressed concern with potential voting bias among youths, whose voter education was suspected to be influenced by the leftist teachers' union, and the military and police, whose independence from the government has been questioned in light of recent increases in their government benefits.

POLLS IN CORREA'S FAVOR

¶5. (SBU) According to all three major polls, Correa has the necessary 40% of the total votes, plus 10% more than the runner-up, to win the presidency in the first round. Since release of polling data was forbidden starting 20 days before the election, the latest published data is from late March and early April. At that time, Correa continued to lead the next closest presidential candidate by 32, 39 and 41 points, according to polling firms Market, CEDATOS and Santiago Perez, respectively, and hovered around the 50% total vote mark by all three. It is likely that Correa will cinch the Presidency in the first round, with former president Lucio Gutierrez and banana tycoon Alvaro Noboa trailing far behind.

PRESIDENTIAL WIN, BUT NOT A CLEAN SWEEP

¶6. (SBU) Unlike the expected PAIS presidential victory, National Assembly seats and local offices continue to be hotly contested. According to pollster Santiago Perez's data from April 5, PAIS is slated to win a slight majority within the legislature (53%), but not enough to block the opposition from taking initial actions to remove cabinet members. This outcome would mark a significant decrease from the 61% of assembly seats they currently hold in the temporary legislature. PAIS's showing in the CEDATOS poll from March 22 is much lower, with only 30%, but 46% undecided.

¶7. (SBU) At the municipal level, running as part of Correa's PAIS movement has not necessarily proven to be the golden ticket for local PAIS candidates. The race for the mayor of Quito continues to be one of the closest, with the PAIS candidate Augusto Barrera edging out Antonio Ricaurte 38% to 29% and 31% to 27%, according to Market and CEDATOS respectively. Current mayor of Guayaquil Jaime Nebot continues to enjoy a comfortable lead, with nearly 70% of the vote. In the province of El Oro where Correa has a 63% approval rating, the PAIS mayoral candidate for the provincial capital only has 20% support, compared to the opposition candidate's 70%.

CONCERNS SURFACE FROM PRE-ELECTION OBSERVATION

¶8. (SBU) The two principal international observation missions by the European Union and the Organization of American States have both expressed concerns during the pre-election week with the limited training and resources for the new and controversial intermediate counting centers (juntas

intermedias). Another major issue raised has been the lack of clarity in the electoral public finance legislation that has allowed excessive usage of official government publicity.

One example occurred on the April 21 weekly public service announcement by the GOE which was essentially a 10-minute defense of the new criminal code that has been openly criticized by the opposition in the latter half of the campaign. According to Citizen Participation, Correa's official campaign has only spent \$300,235 of publically financed election money as of April 17; however, the total amount of government publicity financed during the same period reached over \$2 million dollars. This corresponds to almost 2300 minutes of extra air time, or over four times the amount of the next highest air time of any presidential candidate.

¶9. (SBU) USG support for this year's election totals over half a million dollars. The OAS mission received \$225,000 from the USOAS, and there will be nine U.S. Embassy and Consulate volunteer observers. USAID is providing a total of \$269,000 of technical assistance to the GOE National Electoral Council to implement a country-wide voters-with-disabilities campaign and to the Electoral Disputes Tribunal to increase their institutional capacity through trainings and operational support. The major domestic observation effort by USAID-supported NGO Citizen Participation, will have 8,000 observers in all 24 provinces to monitor election-day proceedings. Citizen Participation will also conduct a quick count of the presidential and assembly races that will be produced parallel to the official GOE count.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) A combination of election fatigue and universal acceptance of another four years of a Correa presidency has made for an uninteresting election at the national level. The lack of new ideas amongst the other presidential hopefuls, or any sincere attempt to address issues of concern, has left the Ecuadorian electorate with no alternative to the status quo. The local campaign races have proven to be more dynamic, and it is likely that any substantial opposition to a future Correa administration will come from local government leaders.

HODGES

=====CABLE ENDS=====